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NARCISSUS

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U. S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

A radio talk by W. R. Beattie, horticulturist, Bureau of Plant Industry, broadcast Thursday, April 24, 10 a.m., by Station WRC.

Good Morning Gardeners: Our subject today is the Narcissus, that beautiful bulbous flower of our gardens which is just now passing out of bloom. Those of you who are up on mythology will doubtless recall the Greek mythological story of Narcissus, a beautiful youth in vain love for whom Echo died. Nemesis punished his indifference for Echo's love by causing him to fall in love with his own reflection which he saw in the water of a fountain. He pined away in desire for his own image and was changed into the flower that bears his name. Had Narcissus been grazing at a glorious display of the flowers that are alleged to have been named for him, we could well understand his attractions, but that would not be mythological, and so today we are turning our gaze, not to a reflection in the water of a fountain, but to beautiful daffodils that herald the coming of a spring.

The Narcissus are known as daffodils, jonquils, and trumpet flowers. The name Narcissus is accepted as the group name, but the term jonquil is properly applied to the jonquilla group and its derivatives. The daffodil is usually applied to all others except the jonquils. The various forms of Narcissus can be grown almost anywhere, in borders, in solid beds, as individual clumps in the lawn, and when once established they are most persistent.

The genus Narcissus belongs to the family of plants known as Amaryllidaceae, thus you will see that the Narcissus is closely related to the Amaryllis. The Narcissus are bulbous plants, and until recently most of the bulbs that we have planted in our gardens have been grown in Europe. On January 1, 1926, a quarantine was issued, cutting off the general importation of narcissus bulbs, and as a result millions of Narcissus bulbs are now being grown in this country.

Mr. B. Y. Morrison, Senior Horticulturist, says: "In choosing varieties of narcissus for planting in the home garden, you should have several things in mind if you are to have a representative group of these charming bulbs. You will soon discover that there are many different types or styles of flower and that by choosing some from each section, you can prolong your season of flowering for over a month. These types are classified according to the style and shape of the flowers, and to some extent by their color as well. Every gardener will want some of the trumpet varieties, the daffodils of English poetry. In their yellow forms they are the earliest sorts. Golden Spur remains the best very early sort, but should be given a warm and well-drained soil if it is to do its best. This is soon followed by King Alfred which is a much larger, deep golden yellow variety that also shares a preference for a warm soil, if it is to flower regularly. Before this is in full bloom, Van Waveren's Giant will be in full glory with truly gigantic flowers in two tones of yellow, and before this is by, the old but still reliable Emperor ushers in the main season of bloom. As a later sort one might choose Cleopatra which is as fine a sort as there is.

Somewhat overlapping in season are the bicolor trumpets, so-called because the trumpets are yellow and the petals, or, as they should be called, perianth segments, are white. Glory of Sassenheim, Glory of Noordwijk and Spring Glory will do well enough for this section, with old fashioned Empress kept also for old times' sake.

Of pure white trumpets there are many, but they are very new and very expensive so that few recommendations can be made except for the variety Mrs. Ernest Krelage which is a superb flower.

The short-cupped varieties that comprise the sections of Incomparabilis, Leedsii, and Barrii, form the main display through the middle of the narcissus season. In this large group one finds all the usual yellow, white, and white and yellow combinations, and in addition cups or short trumpets variously flushed with orange or scarlet. For varieties one might begin with such old sorts as Sir Watkin, Leonie, Homespun for yellows; Great Warley and Lady Margaret Boscowen for yellow and whites; Bernardino, Croesus, and Old Gloria Mundi for varieties with colored cups. In the Leedsii section, noted chiefly for its white and very pale lemon colors, one should certainly have Queen of the North and White Lady for principal sorts, with Hera for a specialty among the shorter cups, Lord Kitchener, Sirdar, Crystal Queen, and Southern Gem for larger cups. In the Barri Section, conspicuous for its small cups, usually with intense color, the beginner might choose Red Beacon, Brillancy, and Firetail. The last sort is still expensive but is both hardy and vigorous as well as rapid in its increase so that in time it will repay any initial investment.

This brings us to the last groups of importance to the amateur, the sweet-scented poeticus varieties and the even more fragrant poetaz sorts.

Among the first one should have Ornatus and Thelma for early varieties; Nightingale and Cassandra for midseason and Raeburn and Caedmon for late varieties, concluding with the very old sort, Recurvous that brings the narcissus pageant to a close. All these kinds have white perianths and small, flat cups of yellow and green with ribbon edges of crimson. All are very fragrant.

The poetaz sorts resemble the tender Paper-White narcissus used for winter forcing but have large flowers and are hardy. The beginner should start with Elvira, Laurens Koster, Admiration and Orange Cup.

Possibly the true jonquils, of which Campernelle will serve as an example, should be included. This variety has several small yellow flowers on a stalk and a characteristic and very delightful scent.

With this as a beginning, the amateur will soon expand his collection to include other varieties for his special taste."

That concludes Mr. Morrison's suggestions regarding the varieties of Narcissus. There are many more varieties to choose from, but I am sure Mr. Morrison has given you good advice regarding the varieties to begin with.

Now, I want to give you a page from my own experience in growing Narcissus, also a few suggestions from Dr. Griffiths', who is handling the bulb work for the Department.

Those of you who already have beds of Narcissus in your gardens will want to know how to handle them after blooming. In the first place, you want to give them as much growth as possible after they bloom. Don't remove the leaves or allow the beds to become weedy, because the removal of the leaves retards the development of the new bulbs and the presence of weeds robs the bulbs of moisture and plant food. On dry soils give them plenty of water, and the addition of fertilizer to the top 2 or 3 inches of soil will help the bulbs to make a good growth. Narcissus bulbs should not be dug until after the leaves have died. The bulbs should then be dug, cured for a month or two then replanted, or they may remain in the soil where they are at least until they become too thick.

In the fall of 1925, or just before the quarantine on the importation of Narcissus bulbs went into effect, I procured a supply of bulbs of about 8 or 10 varieties and planted them in rows in my garden. Each year I have fertilized, watered, and cultivated the bed and allowed the bulbs to remain in the ground for increase. This year, I counted as high as 14 blossoms from a single cluster of bulbs which have developed from one original bulb. I shall dig part of these as soon as the foliage dies, dry them in the shade at a temperature of about 55 or 60 degrees as nearly as possible, then separate the bulbs, and reset them late in August or early in September.

In preparing the new bed for resetting the bulbs, I shall spade it to a depth of 8 or 10 inches, working considerable well rotted manure and plenty of bone meal into the soil. The bulbs will be set singly 8 or 10 inches apart, in rows 15 inches apart, and covered to a depth of approximately 5 inches. With this done my narcissus plantings will be ready for another 4 or 5 years of development with surface applications of fertilizer and clean culture. About the time that the foliage dies, and without disturbing the bulbs, I usually plant the beds with annual flowering plants to make a show in during the summer. For this purpose, I use nasturtium, scarlet sage, petunia marigolds, and old-fashioned zinnias, so that I have something showy in the narcissus beds throughout the late summer. This does not seem to injure the narcissus bulbs, provided the bed is kept well watered and properly fertilized.

Some of the finest specimens of narcissus in my garden are those that are planted singly in the flower borders - just a bulb here and there, stuck down with the trowel and left to develop. These bulbs are planted in August or September, and remain for several years or until it becomes necessary to overhaul or change the entire border, then the location of the bulbs is marked at blooming time by means of little pegs, and the bulbs are later dug, cured and planted in a new location next fall.

If you want to have a real show of narcissus, prepare the beds about midsummer, spade the ground rather deeply as I suggested, working plenty of rotted manure and bone meal into the soil. In the first place, the soil on which you plant the narcissus bulbs must be well drained, and if it is very heavy, you should add sand or some form of humus to lighten it. It is a good plan to spade the ground two or three times then allow it to settle for several days before the bulbs are planted. In planting the bulbs, first

see that the soil is free from lumps, then take the surface perfectly smooth and mark the location for each bulb. I usually sort my bulbs and place each bulb on top of the ground right where it is to be planted, then by means of a long, slender-bladed trowel, I make a hole 5 or 6 inches deep and put in the bulbs, root-end downward. After all of the bulbs are planted the bed is again raked until smooth then given a light watering. That is about all that will be needed, except to keep the surface free from weeds, or if you desire, you may grow some shallow-rooted flowering plant such as sweet alyssum or dwarf nasturtium on the bed during the fall. If you have something growing on the narcissus bed you will be more likely to keep it watered and free from crabgrass and other troublesome fall weeds. No mulch is needed over the narcissus bulbs in the latitude of Washington, or even as far north as southern New York. A top-dressing of well rotted manure will do no harm, as it adds fertility to the soil.

Where I am growing narcissus bulbs to increase my stock, I invariably plant them in rows about 15 inches apart, so that I can cultivate them with a wheel hoe. I find this saves a lot of time and expense in keeping them free from weeds during the early summer.

The following are a few points gleaned from Dr. David Griffiths' bulletin on the "Production of Narcissus Bulbs." First, Dr. Griffiths recommends that the bulbs be carefully sorted as to size, and that the larger bulbs be given a little more space in the bed than the smaller ones, then he emphasizes the importance of deep preparation of the soil, because as he says the roots go down into the soil at least 12 inches. He recommends planting as early in September as possible or even in August, if the bulbs can be procured that early. In planting the bulbs he says do not pack the soil over them, but allow it to settle naturally. He warns about keeping the bed free from weeds, and especially the chick weed, a common weed of the Washington area, because if it once gets started, it goes on growing all winter and will be troublesome in the spring.

In the springtime, very little cultivation is needed, except a little hand-weeding to keep the beds free from spring-growing weeds. After the tops die they are cut off level with the ground, and if the bulbs are to be lifted they are usually dug immediately after the leaves die. If the bulbs are covered with soil when they are dug they should lie on the surface of the ground until dry enough to remove the soil, but if they come out clean and the soil shakes from them readily, they can be simply thrown in little piles then taken up immediately and placed on trays to dry in the shade. The bulbs should be dried Dr. Griffiths says at a comparatively low temperature, that is, such temperature as you would be able to get in an open shed or in the garage where the sun will not strike them, and where they will get plenty of fresh air. It has been found that temperature during the storage period has a great deal to do with the way the bulbs will act when they are again planted, and so it is advised that they be kept as cool as possible without actually putting them into cold storage, although cold storage at a temperature of around 50 or 55 degrees is now being used quite successfully for the storage of the bulbs.

I do not know of any flower that is quite so satisfactory for the spring garden as the narcissus in its different forms. By having a rather wide range of variety you can have flowers over a period of 3 or 4 weeks, usually including Easter time in the latitude of Washington. A few years ago when I planted my bed of narcissus, it looked as though I was going into

• bulb growing on a rather large scale, but I have never regretted it, and this year, not only have we enjoyed the beauty of this bed, but so have all of our neighbors, and we have cut hundreds of flowers.

Owing to the wide adaptability of the Narcissus in its various forms, it would seem that everybody should have a few growing in their flower gardens. If you have not already made a start in growing these splendid bulbs, I would advise you to secure about a dozen bulbs each of 4 or 5 of the varieties suggested by Mr. Morrison and plant them this coming September. If you place them where they can remain year after year they will require little attention and give you a lot of enjoyment. Why not have a little of the ancient Greek mythology in your own garden.

